



NATIONAL GUARD ASSOCIATION OF THE UNITED STATES, INC.

ONE MASSACHUSETTS AVENUE, NW, WASHINGTON, D.C. 20001 (202) 789-0031

Contact: John Goheen at (202) 408-5882

BRAC Threatens One-Third of Air National Guard Flying Units

WASHINGTON (May 17, 2005) — Hundreds of the Air Force's most experienced aircrews and support personnel might soon be pushed out of the military as the nation struggles with securing the homeland while fighting the global war on terrorism.

That's the consequence of the Defense Department's Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) recommendation, which grounds one-third of the Air National Guard's 88 flying units.

The proposal strips all of the aircraft from 28 Air Guard units—most of which have been significant contributors to operations in Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere—without providing identifiable replacement planes or missions.

"This may signal the end of these units and the military service of people in them," said retired Brig. Gen. Stephen M. Koper, president of NGAUS, a 45,000-member association that represents Army and Air National Guard officers on Capitol Hill.

"The recommendations do call for some support personnel to remain," he said. "But without aircraft to support, many will follow the aircrews and just leave the military. Many have deep roots in their community. They simply can't commute, in some cases, hundreds of miles to drill.

"Some of the most valuable assets in the nation's defense arsenal would then be gone for ever," he said.

This was among the messages General Koper shared in testimony this afternoon before the Senate Appropriations Defense Subcommittee.

"What we are seeing is the elimination of the Air Force's most cost-efficient flying units in the name of saving money and greater efficiency," he said. "The savings will be meager and it will come at the cost of further erosion of the connection between American citizens and those who defend them."

– more –

A review of available BRAC support documents reveals that the Pentagon recommendations were rooted largely in criteria that ranked large, complex bases over the Air Guard's smaller but operationally less expensive facilities.

For example, ending flying operations at the Birmingham (Ala.) International Airport Air Guard Station, the Fort Smith (Ark.) Air Guard Station and the Capital (Ill.) Air Guard Station will save a combined total of \$8.8 million over 20 years.

By comparison, closing Cannon Air Force Base, N.M., an active-component installation, will save more than \$2.7 billion over the same span, according to Defense Department estimates.

And little or no consideration was given to the potential loss of highly qualified personnel or their connection with the surrounding community.

"The adjutants general could have spoken eloquently to these issues but they had no opportunity for such input in the BRAC process," General Koper said.

The Pentagon also finalized its BRAC recommendations without the benefit of the 2005 Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR), which will identify threats, develop strategies and allocate resources to combat those threats.

In testimony yesterday before the BRAC Commission that will examine the Pentagon recommendations, Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld implied that the 2005 QDR—the first such comprehensive defense review since 9/11— was just another study.

"We hope the BRAC Commission and Congress will recognize the basic flaws in these recommendations as backwards defense planning that could harm some of this nation's greatest defense assets," General Koper said.

#